

NOTES FOR LYME ART ASSOCIATION CENTENNIAL

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1899 – Beginning of the Lyme Art Colony with the arrival of Henry Ward Ranger.
He boards with Miss Florence Griswold for the summer.

Ranger returned to Old Lyme in the spring of 1900, bringing with him Lewis Cohen, Alphonse Jongers, and Henry Rankin Poore.

1902 – By 1902 Frank Bicknell, George Bruestle, Bruce Crane, Louis Paul Dessar, Frank DuMond, Will Howe Foote, William Howe, William Robinson, Jules Turcas, Henry White, and Carleton Wiggins had also joined the group.

1903 – Childe Hassam arrives in Old Lyme. Shift away from the Tonalism school of painting represented by Ranger towards Impressionism. Over the next ten years, other artists who became part of the American Impressionism movement came to Old Lyme including: Willard Metcalf, Walter Griffin, William Chadwick, Edmund Greacen, Charles Ebert, Edward Simmons, Lawton Parker, Chauncey Ryder, Gifford Beal, Guy Wiggins, Edward Rook, Everett Warner, George Burr, Gregory Smith

According to an article in the Hartford *Courant* dated August 30, 1902, there were 50 artists in town that summer.

The artists held their first exhibition at the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library August 27 & 28, 1902. According to a newspaper account, the Library needed funds to buy books. "One scheme after another was tried until it occurred to someone to ask the artists who spend their summers in the town to exhibit their paintings." The *Courant* reporter noted that the ladies of the Library were in a "joyous frame of mind as the receipts at the door were \$180, which will assist materially towards defraying the annual expenses of the library. In addition to this, they are to receive a percentage of all sales made."

In that first 1902 show, antique furniture, porcelain, china, silverware, and curios were exhibited. By 1903, only paintings were shown. (Thank goodness for that!)

Paintings in 1902 show included:

H. W. Ranger "Moonlight" and "Autumn Woods"

Allen B. Talcott Scene along the river, the old scow boat being loaded with hay at Mott's Island

Walter Griffin Sketch "On the Maine Coast"

Arthur Dawson A charming hillside picture



Lewis Cohen "Golden Spring"

W. H. Howe Animal picture "Truants" and a sketch of cattle drinking at the brook

Frank Vincent DuMond sold "The Sighing Wood" to Mrs. W. G. Lane for \$350.

Gifford Beal showed a variety of hill, wood and lake in his unnamed contribution.

R. Tait McKenzie (professor of anatomy & physical director at McGill University, Montreal) exhibited two bronze statues "The Sprinter" and "The Strength Test"

Louis Dessar "In Evening Shadows"

Clark Voorhees "Early Spring Sunlight"

A bust of William Cullen Bryant commissioned by C. H. Ludington (founder of the Library) occupied a prominent position in the building. !!!!!

Artists and Paintings 1903

21 paintings were exhibited in the 1903 show (all painted in Lyme) The artists donated proceeds of the admission fees as well as a percentage of the sales to the benefit fund of the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library. According to the newspaper account, the artists and paintings were: (I love the descriptions!)

H. R. Poore "After the Chase" (a group of handsome hounds resting on a grassy bank) and "The Hummocks" (a study in brown under a gray sky)

W. H. Howe "On Guard" (a group of fine cattle lying in a grassy meadow with one standing among them with his head raised as if keeping watch); "The Return of the Herd" (a herd of cows making their way home at sunset); "Plowing" (Two yokes of oxen straining at a plow while the farmer urges them on)

H.W. Ranger (autumn forest scene with all the gorgeous vividness of color and a glimpse of a little river in the foreground) and (a winding country road, windswept knolls, a glimpse of a marsh and river and the boat of a fisherman)

Frank Vincent DuMond "Forest of the King" (a group of gayly clad damsels watching the King's men, or Robins Hood's, as they ride through a glade in the forest unconscious of the glances directed toward them) and "The Refugees" (also a forest scene, showing a man, woman and two children with two jaded horses, about to encamp for the night.)

Louis Paul Dessar (total of three landscapes, one entitled "The Upland Pasture")
Descriptions: the larger shows a flock of sheep in a rock pasture, the time being early



morning; the second shows an upland filled with sheep in the foreground, grazing on a hill; the third depicts a pasture in the sober russet of late October.

Allen B. Talcott "Sunset" (an autumn scene that is a view of the Sound seen across a rocky point)

W. H. Foote "A Spring Morning" (a marsh is shown under a sky which is spring itself) and "Meetinghouse Hill" (a study in green)

Lewis Cohen "Spring"/"Spring Morning" He only showed one painting and it is called "Spring" in one review and "Spring Morning" in another. In any case, it shows a glimpse of a meadow bright in delicate golden green and seen across a little pool in the foreground.

Arthur Dawson "A Farmer's Daughter" (shows a girl whose form is half concealed by a bunch of goldenrod—The face is winsome and the painting was widely admired) and "Back of Coult's Farm" (a local scene)

Robert C. Minor (a landscape somber in hue, its tone being relieved by a touch of sunlight seen through massive trees)

Gifford Beal "Marking the Corn Field" (a pair of horses drawing a primitive marker across a plowed field, the pose of man and beasts alike being true to life.)

Clark Voorhees "The District School" (reproduces the property of some rural district. The building is located at the foot of a hill across which gaunt stone walls are outlined.)

Charles H. Davis (a landscape in which oak trees stand out against the sky.)

Childe Hassam "Spring Morning" (the only Impressionist painting in the show, it is a landscape with a single fisherman by the bank of a small stream in the foreground)

These were serious artists; but that didn't prevent them from having some jolly good times. They left behind a permanent record of their stay at Miss Florence's by painting scenes on the wood panels in her dining room. But, in that same room, there is also the merry caricature of the artists entitled "The Fox Hunt" (by Henry Rankin Poore). This clearly shows that they were a fun-loving group and that a lot of high jinks undoubtedly took place.

When the artists gathered on Miss Florence's back porch during the summer months, they referred to themselves as "The Hot Air Club". There was also something that Miss Florence called "The Knockers Club" (and for which Willard Metcalf designed a coat of arms). As can be imagined with a group of artists, there were many loud and lively debates about "art". Of course, whoever wasn't present at the time was "knocked" by the



others—"He's not a very good colorist, nor is he much of a draftsman." The Knockers Club coat of arms was described:

'Below a hand holding a hammer are the quarterlings: a cow's head for William H. Howe, a cattle painter; a pair of feet for Will Howe Foote, his nephew; a griffin for Walter Griffin; and a fez and crescent for Childe Hassam who, despite his New England birth and Puritan ancestry, delighted in insisting that he was an Arab. And beneath it all is an almost obliterated Latin motto which the artists translate freely, "Do as you ---- please." *

*(This is from an article in the *American Motorist*, August 1928)

Another sign of the artists' good humor: The three boats that were docked at Miss Florence's were named *Small Pox*, *Scarlet Fever*, and *Prickly Heat*. The artists used the boats to travel to spots along the Lieutenant River that were ideal painting locations—e.g. the Bow Bridge (where today the Hall's Road bridge crosses the Lieutenant River), mountain laurel sites, etc. (From *The Lieutenant River*)

Childe Hassam, the "Big Cheese" of the group, was quite a cut-up. Nelson C. White recalled him as "a man of glowing health, high spirits and boyish humor (who) used to lead the assembled company into all sorts of pranks, practical jokes and good humored teasing." * Hassam liked to raid the trunks in Miss Florence's attic and pull out funny old clothes (such as a flowered dressing gown or a grey beaver stove pipe hat). He would don his "costume" and then proceed to walk down Lyme Street!! You can imagine the raised eyebrows of the proper Old Lyme matrons as he strolled by.

*From *En Plein Air The Art Colonies at East Hampton and Old Lyme, 1880-1930*

My impression is that these "boys" (as Miss Florence called them) were a fun-loving group. I'm not sure when the "Midsummer Festivals" started in Old Lyme (I'll have to check on that), but certainly they grew out of this tradition of the artists parading about town in the summer and putting on art shows.

This was very much a summer art colony. Though the artists came and went throughout the year, summer was the "high season" when most of them were in residence. It must have been a treat for them to leave their studios in the city and come to the country for the summer. (Reminds me of the New York actors who perform at the Goodspeed Opera House. They love coming to East Haddam for the summer.)

"The colony had its own baseball team, as well as track and field days that were highlighted by paper medals awarded to entries in the fat man's race. Ranger was frequently in the running." (From "Art Colony at Old Lyme" in *Connecticut and American Impressionism* Exh. Cat. The William Benton Museum of Art, The U. of CT, Storrs, CT 1980) pp. 114-37



As the first leader of the new art colony, "Ranger saw to it that, combined with sketching and painting, the days were filled with picnics at the beach, canoe trips on the nearby Lieutenant River, games of horseshoes and baseball, and, in the evening, impromptu musicals in which Ranger played the organ he had shipped in from New York." (I guess Ranger was the social director until Hassam arrived in town!)

"In the Good Ole Summertime" might be a "natural" theme for the midsummer show. I hope the LAA continues to hold the "Summer Solstice Celebration" that it started last year. Seems only right that a summer art colony would have a big bash to welcome the "official" arrival of summer in June! Then, of course, in July comes the town-wide midsummer festival. I found this wonderful description of the LAA summer shows in the *American Motorist* article, dated August 1928:

For every July when the Lyme Art Association opens the doors to its annual exhibition the whole village and surrounding countryside awakes to a regular orgy of art and delightful social festivities. The yellow pennants streaming from tall flagpoles at either end of the terrace, dainty tea tables gay with attractive china and lovely flowers, to say nothing of the pretty girls who serve tea and punch to visitors on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, all lure thousands of visitors to delight in the paintings and sculpture within that are so pleasantly introduced by the gayety without.

In that same *American Motorist* article, there is a description of how the artists marked the end of the season with one final affair:

But summer passes all too swiftly in this magic country and the evening of the Saturday after Labor Day sees Japanese lanterns alight about the gallery grounds and a gay pageant-like procession. It is the annual Artists' Frolic, a costume ball that marks the end of another happy season of work and play.

Sounds neat, doesn't it? This would be a great tradition to revive! By the way, I found a box of Japanese lanterns in the storeroom. Are you familiar with the Harry Hoffman painting *The Harvest Moon Walk*? It's currently on display at the Flogris and must be a depiction of one of these annual "Artists' Frolics."

EARLY LYME ARTISTS AND WHAT YEARS THEY WERE IN OLD LYME

Matilda Browne in OL periodically c. 1905-06 & 1911-24

Lewis Cohen summers 1900-15

Bruce Crane summers 1902-37



Louis Paul Dessar 1900-c. 1950

Eugene Higgins summers c. 1924-58

William Henry Howe periodically 1900-20

Robert C. Minor exhibited with OL artists only once in 1903, a year before he died.

Henry Rankin Poore periodically 1900-c. 1935

Henry Ward Ranger 1899-1903

Allen B. Talcott summers 1901-08

library

Jules Turcas summers 1902-17

Henry C. White spring & fall 1903-07

Carleton Wiggins summers 1904-16; permanently 1917-32

Edward Simmons & J. Alden Weir each spent one summer in OL

Other artists:

William Chadwick

Edward Rook

Robert Nisbet

Harry Hoffman

Arthur Heming

By 1910-11, Everett Warner, George Burr, Gregory Smith, Edmund Greacen, Chauncey Ryder. Followed soon after by Lawton Parker, Katherine Langhorne Adams, Wilson Irvine, Martin Borgard and Lucien Abrams

SOME EARLY LYME PAINTINGS

Allen B. Talcott, "Autumn, Lyme" 1903, Oil on board 12 x 16 1/8" LHS

Louis Paul Dessar, "Connecticut Hillside" Blace conté 5 7/8" x 8" LHS

Carleton Wiggins, "Sheep at Pasture" watercolor 2 7/8 x 4 1/8" LHS

Bruce Crane, "SnowScene" watercolor and gouache 10 7/8 x 18 5/8" The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Louis Paul Dessar, "The Toilers" 1907, oil on canvas 18 x 36" LHS

*Voorhees - library
Ranger - library*

Lewis Cohen, "Huntington Oaks" oil on panel 11 ¼ x 15 ¼ LHS

Bruce Crane, "October Day" oil on canvas 18 x 24 Lyman Allyn Museum

Jules Turcas, "Potato Harvest" oil on panel 10 ¾ x 13 ¼ Nathan Liverant & Son,
Colchester, CT.

Lucien Abrams, "Landscape, Lieutenant River" 1915 oil on canvas 26 x 32 Lyman Allyn
Museum

The "golden days" of the Lyme Art Colony are the years from 1900-1915.

SOME POPULAR SONGS OF THE DAY

1899 Scott Joplin "Maple Leaf Rag"

1902 "In the Good Ol' Summertime"

1904 "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis"

1908 "Shine on Harvest Moon"

1909 "By the Light of the Silvery Moon"

1914 W.C. Handy "St. Louis Blues"

1920 Youmans "Tea for Two"

